

A Deliberate, Palpable and Dangerous Exercise of Other Powers: James Madison & Homeland Security

Civics/History Lesson Plan – Grades 7-12

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Overview:

In this lesson students explore the reaction of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson to the passage and use of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. Many different perspectives on the social studies themes of power, authority and governance and civic ideals and practices are found in this lesson.

Purpose:

This lesson provides students an opportunity to use primary source documents as they examine the meaning of the First Amendment freedoms of speech and press as they apply during times of national conflict.

Connection to the curriculum: Civics, American Government, American History.

Grade Level: 6 - 12

Time: 2-3 class periods

Objective(s):

- Students will use information from original text sources to explain how the Alien and Sedition Acts came to be enacted and the national and international events which spurred their enactment.

- Students will demonstrate application of the historian's skills of asking historical questions, acquiring historical information, and answering historical questions.

- Students will create a group presentation using contemporary newspaper accounts on issues of First Amendment freedoms of speech and press as they apply to the USA Patriot Act.

NCSS Thematic Strands:

Power, Authority, and Governance

- c. analyze and explain ideas and governmental mechanisms to meet needs and wants of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, and establish order and security (Middle Grades).

Civic Ideals and Practices

- a. explain the origins and interpret the continuing influence of key ideals of the democratic republican form of government, such as individual human dignity, liberty, justice, equality, and the rule of law (High School).

- h. evaluate the degree to which public policies and citizen behaviors reflect or foster the stated ideals of a democratic republican form of government (High School).

Materials needed:

- Copies of the letter from Madison to Jefferson of May 13, 1798.
- Copies of the Virginia Resolutions Against the Alien and Sedition Acts.
- Copies of (or internet access to) the USA Patriot Act.
- Copies of selected newspaper articles addressing issues of conflict generated by the USA Patriot Act.
- Computers with internet connections for additional research desirable (though not necessary).

Procedures:

1. Briefly review the events of the 1790s which were occurring in the world, especially in terms of relationships between England and France.
2. Have students read the Madison letter closely and answer the following questions:
 - What type of document is this?
 - When was it created?
 - Who created it?
 - Why was it created?
 - What issues are addressed in it?
 - How does it fit into the political events of the day?
3. Discuss as a whole group the students' responses, providing additional information about the Alien and Sedition Acts as needed.
4. Divide the class into six groups, assigning each group to read and analyze the Virginia Resolutions according to these categories:
 - The state of conflict which existed between the United States and France.
 - The state of conflict which existed between the Adams administration and its critics.
 - The attitudes of individuals in states other than Virginia and Kentucky.
 - The attitudes of individuals in Virginia and Kentucky.
 - The political role newspapers played in this time period.
 - The political role the courts played in this time period.
5. Upon completion, have each group present their analysis to the class. Ask students to explain what evidence in these two documents helps them to know why they were written.
6. Have students compile a collection of newspaper editorials which represent various viewpoints on the need for and use of the USA Patriot Act.

Extensions/Enrichments:

- *Students can research and develop position papers and/or debate topics on how national conflict puts pressures on individual rights and liberties.
- *Students can examine the history of sedition through Supreme Court decisions and/or acts of Congress.
- *Students can compare political relationships and international relations of the late 1790s to various events in the 20th and 21st century.

Assessment:

- Student note-taking and questions about assigned text reading.
- Small group presentations - use a rubric or checklist to assess both content and format.

Resources**Books**

- Kobrin, David. *Beyond the Textbook: Teaching History Using Documents and Primary Sources*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996.
- Levy, Leonard. *Legacy of Suppression: Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Rakove, Jack (ed). *James Madison, Writings*. New York, NY: Library of America, 1999.

Websites:

How to work with primary and secondary documents in the study of history:

<<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/psources/analyze.html>>

The USA Patriot Act of 2001:

<<http://www.epic.org/privacy/terrorism/hr3162.html>>

The Sedition Act of 1798:

<<http://ushda.org/sedition.shtml>>